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SUBJECT: DODIK TARGETS YET ANOTHER STATE INSTITUTION (BHRT)

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1B. SARAJEVO 90

¶1. (SBU) Summary: RS Prime Minister Dodik recently launched a frontal attack against BiH's national public broadcaster, BHRT, demanding that it be forced into bankruptcy, as part of his broader campaign to attack state-level institutions. As he has in other political initiatives, Dodik has sought to enlist Croat support for this position by invoking the sensitive issue of Croat-language broadcasting and calling for the creation of a public broadcasting service to serve Croats modeled along the lines of RTRS. More ominously, Dodik threatened that if BHRT were to continue operating as it is now, it could lead to the "disappearance" of BiH. End summary.

¶2. (U) Drawing from a recent State Auditor report into the dysfunction of the public broadcast system, including problems with the state-level public broadcaster, BHRT, RS Prime Minister Dodik on April 24 called for BHRT to begin bankruptcy proceedings and to be liquidated. He justified his call on the grounds that the institution is operating in the red (its losses amounted to 25 million KM in 2006) and allegations that some of its officials had been involved in criminal activities. Dodik also proposed that the monthly subscription fee that Bosnians pay to support Bosnia's public broadcasting system be reduced from six to three KM (at the current exchange rate 1USD equals 1.25KM). He noted that RTRS was a good example of how a public broadcaster should operate, echoing his familiar theme that RS institutions function better than those at the state level or in the Federation.

¶3. (U) Dodik went on to assert that Bosnian Croats also deserve their own public broadcasting TV channel similar to RTRS. Dodik called for the protection of Croat rights through the "elimination" of the existing mono-ethnic national public broadcaster, which he described as &full of criminals.⁸ He advocated the creation of a new Croat public broadcasting service based in Mostar. This issue remains sensitive for Croat parties which throughout the year have sought to invoke vital national interest (VNI) vetoes at both the state and Federation levels to block PBS legislation that does not include provisions for a Croatian language service. As he has on other issues, such as his implied support for a third Croat entity, Dodik is again playing to Croat sensitivities in order to enlist the support of Croat political parties in his efforts to consolidate the administrative and political autonomy of the RS.

¶4. (U) Dodik continued his attack on BHRT by publishing an open letter to BHRT and the Federation public television

broadcaster FTV on April 26, saying that BHRT should have been forced into bankruptcy long ago and that Social Democratic Party (SDP) leader Zlatko Lagumdzija had been using BHRT to work against the RS. Dodik again stated that RS citizens had far too long "been forced to pay expensive fees" to support public television that was working against RS citizens, interest. Dodik concluded by warning BHRT that if it continued with its current practices it could lead to the "disappearance" of both BHRT and BiH.

¶5. (U) Dodik's attacks on BHRT provoked swift reactions from political leaders. Lagumdzija responded with an April 28 open letter of his own to High Representative Miroslav Lajcak and PIC ambassadors. In the April 28 letter, Lagumdzija criticized Lajcak for remaining silent in the wake of Dodik's provocative statements noting that, "seventeen years ago Radovan Karadzic started his criminal path with a request for the division along ethnic lines of the then RTVSA, a station with a four-decade long tradition at that time." He accused Lajcak of bearing responsibility for Dodik's actions with his charge that, "together with the reformers who have jointly adopted false police reform, you are the most responsible for Dodik's behavior, which has now resulted in an open invitation towards the disappearance of BiH." Lagumdzija concluded by urging the High Representative to use the Bonn Powers to enforce the laws on public broadcasting and to use the OHR's anti-corruption analysis cell to investigate allegations against BHRT.

¶6. (U) As currently configured, BiH's public broadcasting system consists of a nation-wide broadcaster BiH Radio and Television (BHRT) responsible for the entire state, Federation Television (FTV) responsible for the Federation

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entity, and Radio and Television Republika Srpska (RTRS) responsible for the RS. BiH's public broadcasting system was first suggested by the PIC in June 1998 and has been the subject of controversy ever since. In May 2002, after failed attempts by Bosnian legislators to pass public broadcast legislation, the High Representative established BHRT by decree in the Public Broadcasting Law of 2002. Many important provisions of that law that go beyond the scope of this cable have yet to be implemented leading to the current furor over the role and structure of public broadcasting.

¶7. (SBU) Comment: BHRT is an easy target for Dodik. While Dodik's claims that it is anti-RS is groundless -- neutral observers agree that BHRT provides fair and balanced broadcasting and is doing its best to serve the needs of all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina -- BHRT has been bleeding red ink as long as it has been in existence, and the quality and popularity of its programming lags well behind its FTV and RTRS entity counterparts. However, much of this loss is due to BHRT's uncertain status and failure to establish the broadcasting corporation, the fourth and final element of the nationwide public broadcasting system, which would assume many of the liabilities for the system currently shouldered by BHRT. Blame for both rests with local politicians. Dodik's attack on BHRT is both the latest salvo in his ongoing campaign against state-level institutions and also an attempt to marginalize media outlets critical of his government (Ref B). The attack also follows Dodik's now familiar pattern of citing the dysfunctionality of state institutions as a justification for reclaiming RS competencies previously ceded to the state, and seeking Croat support in the process. End Comment

ENGLISH